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Oceans

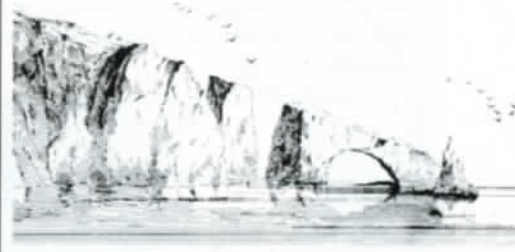
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by Harold D. Casey

Photographs by the Author

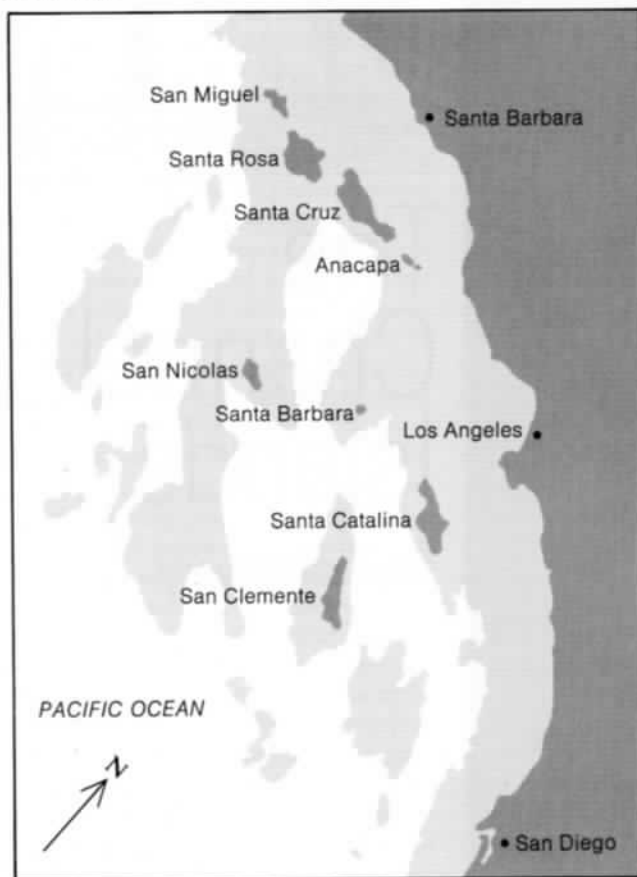


U.S. Coast Survey

The Channel Islands

their discovery

During the early Pleistocene, the Channel Islands were part of the landmass in an extensive archipelago. The black zones show the present land areas. (After T. Clements)



Who has not dreamed of an island retreat for escaping the anxieties and tribulations inherent in our modern civilization? Eight such islands exist in the Pacific Ocean only 16 to 80 kilometers (10 to 50 miles) from one of the most heavily populated areas in the United States. They extend over a range of about 241 kilometers (150 miles) off the coast of southern California, from Los Angeles to Point Conception. These islands include Santa Catalina, Anacapa, Santa Barbara, San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, San Clemente, and San Nicholas.

A look at these islands will show much of our earth's biological and geological past. Geophysicists have pointed out that the islands were probably connected to the mainland at least once, and more likely several times, in the past 100,000 years. Evidence of this fact is based upon the fossil remains of an extinct dwarfed mammoth, *Archidiskodon exilis*, and the presence of rare island foxes, *Urocyon littoralis*, on most of the islands. In addition, some of the islands contain fossilized trunks and logs of Douglas fir, *Pseudotsuga taxifolia*; cypress trees, *Cupressus goveniana*; and other plant species that still exist in California.

In the long geological history of California, deformation of the earth's crust by faulting and changes in sea level separated the islands from the mainland. The changes in sea level are associated with the huge ice sheets that once covered much of North America. Many authorities believe that sea level was once 30.5 meters (100 feet) higher than at present and that in another period it dropped more than 122 meters (400 feet) below its present position. Others believe that the sea level has been steadily rising with the melting of the Wisconsin ice sheet some 11,000 to 25,000 years ago, and it may still be rising!

The separation of the islands from the continental land mass left the plant and animal life to fight their own battle with Mother Nature. This, over a long period of time, meant a different evolutionary course for life on the islands. The end result is that the insular plants and animals have evolved distinctive characteristics unknown elsewhere. Extraordinary too are the variety and richness of the native forms.

This wealth and variety similarly characterize the marine plants and animals. Relatively undisturbed by man and uncontaminated by pollution, northern and southern species mingle at the islands, where there are important colonies of sea elephants, sea lions, sea otter, seals, sea gulls and pelicans.

Not only do the islands form a valuable geological and biological laboratory, but they also constitute a natural museum of anthropology. There is much evidence of prehistoric habitation; one estimate of the number of Indians living on the islands during the peak of their culture was 20,000. Archaeological findings lead to speculation that this may be one of North America's oldest inhabited regions.

CATALINA ISLAND

Most famous of the eight islands is the beautiful island of Santa Catalina. Captured in song and story, Catalina is world famous. A year-round attraction for fishermen, yachtsmen, and fun-lovers, Catalina boasts an incorporated city, Avalon, which has a permanent population of about 2,000.

In its history, Catalina has played host to Spanish and Portuguese explorers; British, American and Russian fur hunters; smugglers; pirates; and to ships of many other nations. Its first owner was Thomas M. Robbins. In 1839, he petitioned Governor Alvarado for the island of Catalina for agriculture and cattle breeding. Governor Pio Pico finally

granted Robbins' request several years later. According to legend, Robbins consummated the deal by presenting the governor with a beautiful silver saddle.

In 1850, Jose Maria Covarrubias purchased the island from Robbins for \$10,000, after Robbins had decided that the island was worthless for his endeavor. Covarrubias evidently felt the same, for three years later, he sold the island at a \$9,000 loss. The new owner was Albert Packard who, in 1869, sold the island to James Lick for \$23,000. Ownership again changed in 1887 when it was purchased by George R. Shatto for \$200,000, followed by William Banning in 1892. William Wrigley, the chewing gum magnate, bought the island in 1919 for \$3 million, and his family still retains ownership. It was Wrigley's farsightedness that made beautiful Catalina the tourist paradise that it is today.

ANACAPA ISLAND

Both Anacapa and Santa Barbara Islands have been under the protection of the National Park Service as a wildlife refuge since 1938.

Anacapa, comprising 284 hectares (700 acres), is really a slender chain of three small islands—East, Middle, and West Islands. The chain is about eight kilometers (five miles) long and 0.8 meter (half a mile) wide. Anacapa is characterized by nearly perpendicular, surf-eroded cliffs that provide sanctuary for marine birds and mammals. Countless sea gulls, pelicans, sea lions, and seals frequent this haven. The National Park Service administers 218 hectares (538 acres) of the island; the remaining 66 hectares (162 acres) belong to the U.S. Coast Guard and are the site for the Anacapa Lighthouse.

SANTA BARBARA ISLAND

Santa Barbara Island contains 263 hectares (650 acres), of which 236 are administered by the National Park Service, including the 5.3-hectare (13-acre) Sutil Island offshore; 23 hectares (57 acres) are under the authority of the U.S. Coast Guard as a lighthouse reservation.

The island is roughly triangular, its greatest dimension being 2 kilometers (one and one-quarter miles). It is girdled by almost vertical cliffs. Small, rocky bays and occasional sandy beaches offer excellent resting places for marine mammals. There are large rookeries of sea lions, sea elephants, and birds on the island.

In July 1967, both Anacapa and Santa Barbara were established as a park site, the Channel Islands National Monument. Camping is permitted on the islands, but the Park Service advises that you must bring your own food, cooking equipment, water, and fuel for campfires since there are no accommodations for visitors. Transportation to the islands must be arranged for privately.

Both islands in the park have magnificent spring wild flower displays, many of them found only on these islands, as well as beautiful and dramatic seascapes consisting of numerous littoral caves, rock arches, offshore pillars and spray-spouting stacks.

SAN MIGUEL ISLAND

San Miguel (including the 4-hectare, 10-acre, Prince Island off its northeast shore) comprises about 5,670 hectares (14,000 acres) and is under Navy Department jurisdiction. It is not open to the public. The Portuguese explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo died on this island in 1543; his burial place has never been found.

Most of the island is from 122 to 152 meters (400 to 500 feet) in elevation; the highest point is about 253 meters



Sea otters, seals, sea lions, pelicans, cormorants and sea gulls reproduce on the isolated islands. This colony of California sea lions is on Santa Barbara Island.



(831 feet). Attractive physical features include unspoiled sandy beaches, scenic cliffs and sea caves. One of the largest known colonies of sea elephants exists on San Miguel, as do colonies of sea lions. Sea otter and fur seals, now rare in California waters, visit the island occasionally. The San Miguel fox, a distinct variety, together with great rookeries of seabirds and several pairs of nesting American eagles, reside on the island.

Considerable erosion has occurred on the island, caused by sheep grazing in the mid-1800's; however, native vegetation is reestablishing itself and now presents a fine spring-time show of wild flowers.

SANTA ROSA ISLAND

Santa Rosa, with an area of 22,275 hectares (55,000 acres), is approximately 24 kilometers (15 miles) long, with a maximum width of 16 kilometers (10 miles). The island is generally mountainous, with many deeply eroded gullies and ravines. Its highest point, near the center of the island, is 484.5 meters (1,589 feet) above sea level. The 72-kilometer (45-mile) shoreline of the island varies in character from bold, high rocky cliffs etched by numerous sea caves to attractive beaches with sand dunes up to 122 meters (400 feet) in height.

Kelp, a seaweed, *Macrocystis pyrifera*, surrounds the greater part of Santa Rosa which provides a natural habitat for countless varieties of marine vertebrates and invertebrates. It also serves as a refuge for sea otters. Rookeries of marine waterfowl abound on the island. The small Channel Island fox and skunk are native species, while the tule elk, Kaibab deer, and Siberian snow deer were stocked there in recent years.

The island vegetation is mainly grass and other low ground cover, augmented by a few species of trees and shrubs. A variety of annual and perennial wild flowers also adorn the landscape.

Santa Rosa is privately owned. In 1902 the Vail and Vickers interests purchased the island and continue to this day to raise cattle there. A small portion of the island is also under cultivation. The Air Force leases 136 hectares (336 acres), and there is a small military installation at Johnson's Lee on the island's south side.

With advance permission you may land, but only at Bechers Bay and in the daytime.

SANTA CRUZ ISLAND

The largest of the islands, Santa Cruz, is 33.8 kilometers (21 miles) long and averages 8 kilometers (5 miles) in width. It has a shoreline of about 105 kilometers (65 miles) and embraces more than 25,110 hectares (62,000 acres). Its highest point is more than 732 meters (2,400 feet) in elevation, and there are several other peaks reaching a height of nearly 518 meters (1,700 feet).

Santa Cruz has a park-like atmosphere of rolling meadows laced with groves of oak and pine trees. It is the only place in the world where the Santa Cruz pine, *Pinus remorata*, occurs. Along the shoreline are many attractive and well-protected coves. The names of the island's anchorages suggest some of its background: Prisoner's Harbor (the island was once a Mexican penal colony); Smugglers Cove; Coches Prietos, "black pigs" (for the Mexican-introduced animals, now wild); and Pelican Bay. The island is also famous for its sea caves; the largest and best known is Painted Cave.

The development of Santa Cruz is credited to the late Justinian Claire, who maintained a cattle ranch on the

The Channel Islands are a valuable sanctuary for wildlife in these days of dredged estuaries and few undisturbed tidelands. This immature California sea gull hatched out in a rookery on Anacapa Island.



island from 1865 to 1869. He bought the island in 1869 and established a colony there. Wineries, living quarters, stables, a bakery and blacksmith shop were constructed, and nearly 100 people resided on the island near the turn of the century. In 1937, Edwin Stanton purchased all but 3,240 hectares (8,000 acres). Today, the Stanton Ranch includes some 22,275 hectares (55,000 acres) for the grazing of livestock. The Gherini family, descendants of Justinian Claire, uses 2,430 hectares (6,000 acres) on the eastern side of the island for raising sheep. Other inhabitants today include the Navy which leases 26 hectares (64 acres) atop one of Santa Cruz's hills as a radar training center.

Fire and vandalism caused the owners to require visitors to secure written permission to land. A commercial enterprise has constructed a picturesque village at Albert's Anchorage. It consists of six little palm-thatched cabanas with improved facilities.

A seldom visited stone cross on San Miguel Island commemorates Juan Cabrillo, the Portuguese who discovered the Channel Islands and claimed them for the Spanish crown in 1542. Injured earlier, Cabrillo died and reportedly lies in an unmarked grave somewhere on the island.



Robert Kinyon

SAN CLEMENTE ISLAND

San Clemente Island is closed to the public. Former sailors and aviators will recall that San Clemente is the island that should have sunk, because of the tons of shells and explosives that have poured into the landscape in practice battle tactics since the early part of World War II.

In the earlier years a man named Charles Howland leased the island from the United States Government for raising sheep. Howland did much for the island by constructing dams to catch the occasional rainfalls and growing hay and wheat. Other sheep ranchers subsequently tried their luck on the island; the last was Thomas Murphy, who lived on the island for 18 years, until 1944.

Tales of bootlegging, smuggling, and buried treasure are intermixed in the history of San Clemente. It is reported that bootleggers of the Prohibition period used the island's caves to evade the ever-relentless government agents.

SAN NICHOLAS ISLAND

San Nicholas Island, located some 122 kilometers (76 miles) from the Los Angeles Harbor, is an important proving ground for guided missiles. It is consequently closed to the public. The Federal Government owns the island; the Navy administers it.

San Nicholas has a fascinating story in its history, about an Indian woman, Juana Maria, who lived alone on the island for approximately twenty years. She was marooned there when mission priests evacuated the Indian population to the mainland in 1835. When the group boarded the ship that was to take them to the mainland, she remained behind to look for her son who had become separated from the group. The ship had to leave when a storm came up, and it never returned to the island. Not until almost twenty years later did anyone discover that the Indian woman was living on the island and take her to the mission at Santa Barbara. Although none of the people could understand her speech, she indicated that wild animals had killed her son and that she had survived by herself. Ironically, Juana Maria—unaccustomed to the living conditions of the mainlanders—died several weeks after being “rescued.” She is buried in the mission graveyard at Santa Barbara.

THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

The northern five islands off the coast of southern California are collectively called the “Channel Islands.” They include Anacapa, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel. The Channel Islands are separated from the California mainland by the Santa Barbara Channel, which extends from Point Hueneme to Point Conception—a distance of 101 kilometers (63 miles). The islands roughly parallel the coast. Anacapa is only 18 kilometers (11 miles) from the mainland. San Miguel, the westernmost island, is only 37 kilometers (23 miles). Between them are Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa. Santa Barbara Island is geographically isolated from the others and lies off San Pedro, California.

Effectively buffered by the Santa Barbara Channel and the lack of public conveyance, the Channel Islands remain nearly untouched by all but occasional fishermen and the more adventuresome private boat owners.

As previously mentioned, two of the islands, Anacapa and Santa Barbara, comprise the Channel Islands National Monument, with Mr. Don Robinson as superintendent. In 1959, the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, an agency within the National Park Service, undertook a study of all the islands of the United States to determine which have park

and recreational values. Following the study, a bill was introduced in January 1968, in the House of Representatives by Representative John E. Moss (D., California). It calls for the creation of a Channel Islands National Park and includes all of the Channel Islands. (Specifically, one difference between a national monument and a national park is that the President can set aside a monument but a park must be created by Congress.)

This was not the first time that such a bill has been introduced in Congress. A year earlier Representative Moss introduced a similar bill, and, in 1963, the late Senator Clair Engle (D., California) sponsored a bill which would have made a national seashore out of San Nicholas, San Miguel, Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz islands. Neither bill made it through Congress.

The National Park Service believes that the Channel Islands "...constitute a recreational resource unique to the continental United States: a potential marine park offering a remarkable variety of recreational opportunities to an ever-swelling metropolitan region. Boating, fishing, diving, picnicking, hiking, camping, and exploring the islands' rugged yet inviting terrain are only some of the outdoor activities the islands offer. And there is perhaps no place in the world near so many people where as wide a range of marine mammals can be observed." Further, once they attain National Park status, "...the Channel Islands can be administered for public enjoyment today and conserved for the future."

Conflict over the proposed Channel Islands National Park has not developed any great heat; it has never reached a hearing in any committee of Congress. The Navy Department, however, has cooperated with the Interior Department in studying the park value of San Miguel Island. The private owners of Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa are opposed, with good reasons, to the park plan.

The future of the Channel Islands remains in doubt. Yet, one of the arguments used to oppose the creation of the Yosemite National Monument in 1890 might be applicable: "Only for the rugged and rich." In that year only 10,000 people visited the park; in 1966 the visitor count at Yosemite was 1,817,000.

DISCOVERY OF THE CHANNEL ISLANDS

The discovery of the Channel Islands is attributed to the Portuguese navigator Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo. Don Antonio de Mendoza, Viceroy of Mexico, sent Cabrillo to penetrate the mysteries of the northeastern Pacific Ocean in two small caravels, *SAN SALVADOR* and *LA VICTORIA*. Among the leading motives for the coastwise exploration of North America was the search for the Straits of Anian and the Island of California.

The Straits of Anian, a mythical Northwest Passage, theoretically extended from the east coast of the New World to the west coast. It would have provided a shortcut from Europe to Cathay and Cipango (China and Japan).

Warrior women reportedly inhabited the mythical Island of California, and their Amazonian Queen Calafia was believed to be both fabulously beautiful and wealthy.

Cabrillo's two small caravels sailed through the Santa Barbara Channel on October 13, 1542. As they passed, they observed the Channel Islands. However, they erroneously supposed them to be only one island and named them *Isla de San Lucas*. Cabrillo later discovered this error but apparently did not rename the islands. Cabrillo was injured and later died on San Miguel. He was reportedly buried on the island on January 3, 1543. On the anniversary of his death, 394 years later, the Cabrillo Civic Clubs erected a simple stone

cross still on the island, bearing the inscription:

JOAO RODRIGUES CABRILHO
Portuguese Navigator
Discoverer of California 1542
Isle of Burial 1543

The log of the Cabrillo expedition maintained by the chief pilot, Bartolome Ferrello, lay forgotten in the archives of Spain until recent years. For this reason, the name bestowed upon the islands by Cabrillo did not survive.

There is no record of a ship touching at the islands for the next 50 years. During this time, however, Spain had discovered the Spice Islands (Philippines), and treasure-laden Spanish galleons soon learned that the most practical return route from Manila was northward to the Japanese Current and across the Pacific Ocean to Point Mendocino on the coast of California. Undoubtedly, the Chumash Indians who resided on the Channel Islands glimpsed their sails on the horizon as these ships, bursting with riches and reeking with scurvy, followed the California Current past the islands.

These treasure-laden galleons brought Sir Francis Drake's *GOLDEN HIND* into the Pacific on his famous privateering enterprise of 1579. If he sighted the islands or landed on their shores, he left no record of the event.

Andres de Urdaneta, returning from the Philippines in 1585, sighted an island off the California coast that he called *San Salvador*. This was Cabrillo's name for Santa Catalina Island (southeast of the Channel Islands) but, according to one authority, the island Urdaneta observed was likely either San Miguel or San Nicholas Island, which lies south of the Channel Islands.

Francisco Gali did not mention any of the Channel Islands even though he followed the California coast from about Monterey Bay southward in the year 1584. Nor did Pedro de Unamuno mention them as he sailed along the California coast from Morro Bay southward in 1589.

The next visitor to the Channel Islands was Sebastián Rodriguez Cermeño, about 52 years after Cabrillo's death. He was sent from Manila in 1595 to explore California in order to find a port-of-call on the coast. The Spanish crown needed a safe place for the homeward bound Manila galleons to anchor, make repairs, and relieve the sailors suffering the terrible scourge of scurvy. His vessel, the *SAN AGUSTÍN*, drove onto the rocks at Drake's Bay and sank. The crew built two barks from the planks of the ship. Since they had few provisions, they had to obtain sustenance from the sea and by barter with the Indians.

They sailed through the Santa Barbara Channel on December 14, 1595 and, in the Channel, Cermeño met Chumash Indians who hailed his crew as "Cristianos!" The men landed on both Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz; however, Cermeño's only comment on the islands was that they were "bare and sterile, although inhabited by Indians."

Seven years later Sebastián Vizcaino was dispatched from Mexico to explore the outer coast of California. Under his command was the *SANTO TOMÁS*, a trading vessel, the *fragata* *TRES REYES* (a small tender propelled by both oars and sails), and the flagship *SAN DIEGO*. Parched throats and the ever-present spectre of scurvy attended the expedition. He sailed into the Santa Barbara Channel on December 1, 1602 and named it "la Canal de Santa Barbara." His three ships sailed between the islands and stopped several times. Father Antonio de la Ascensión, the hooded, bare-footed friar who accompanied the expedition, noted the islands to be "very well inhabited with people very friendly to the Spaniards." Vizcaino anchored off the islands on

*Sunrise at Frenchy's Cove
on Anacapa Island
silhouettes East Island against
a variegated horizon.*




several occasions, and some of his men went ashore. Unfortunately, accounts of the expedition, according to one authority, permit the identification of only one of the islands — San Miguel, Cabrillo's burial place.

In 1769, the newly appointed governor of California, Gaspar de Portolá, took command of three separate parties sent out from Mexico to explore and occupy California. The famous Franciscan missionary, Father Junipero Serra, accompanied him. Portolá's soldiers were to set up garrisons at San Diego and Monterey, while the priests established missions under the direction of Father Serra.

Two ships laden with supplies were instructed to meet the overland expedition at the port of San Diego. One of these ships was the *SAN ANTONIO*, commanded by Juan Pérez. Pérez had been told that San Diego was located at 34 degrees north latitude. As a result of this misinformation, he missed the port and sailed to the vicinity of the Channel Islands. On several occasions parties went ashore, and one of the priests made many interesting and valuable notes about the Indian inhabitants.

For the next twenty years, the names given to the Channel Islands changed a number of times. Costanso's map of 1770 has the three westerly islands listed as San Bernardo (San Miguel), San Miguel (Santa Rosa), and Santa Cruz. In 1774 Juan Pérez in the ship *SANTIAGO* called them Santa Rosa (San Miguel), Santa Margarita (Santa Rosa), Santa Cruz, and Santo Tomás (Anacapa).

While the Spanish explorers were busy in the southwest, Russian and English explorers were active in the northwest. In 1792 the English navigator, George Vancouver, set out for a voyage around the world that was to include further exploration on the northwest coast of America. As a young man he had visited the area 14 years earlier with Captain James Cook. After making several trips between Hawaii and California, then known by the British as New Albion, he sailed homeward and southward around Cape Horn. In October, 1794, he passed many Spanish California settlements and made a careful survey of the Channel Islands and the southern California coast. Vancouver had obtained an early Spanish chart in the 1790's that gave the present names to the islands. He listed these names on his own charts, which later became the basis for the Admiralty maps.

Since their discovery in 1542, the Channel Islands have been little more than another navigational hazard to sailors on dark, foggy nights. As a result, they remain relatively unchanged for today's adventuresome explorers. 

VISITOR INFORMATION

For general information on the Channel Islands contact: Superintendent, Channel Islands National Monument, P.O. Box 1388, Oxnard, California 93030.

For permission to land at the private islands:

Santa Rosa: Write to Vail and Vickers, 123 W. Padre Street, Santa Barbara, California 93105.

Santa Cruz: For the main part of the island, write to Santa Cruz Island Company, Suite 1400, 615 S. Flower Street, Los Angeles, California 90017. For the eastern end, write either Mr. Pier Gherini, 230 La Arcada Building, Santa Barbara, California 93104, or Mr. Francis Gherini, 162 S. "A" Street, Oxnard, California 93030. Village at Albert's Anchorage: Write to the Santa Cruz Island Club, 2365 E. Main Street, Ventura, California 93003.

Arch Rock, also called the Arch of Cabrillo, stands like a sentinel, seaward of Anacapa Island. Its defiant cliffline epitomizes the Channel Islands' uncompromised naturalness.

